

China's Ambition to Balance Power within the Framework of Soft and Normative Power Concepts

Çin'in Yumuşak ve Normatif Güç Kavramları Çerçevesinde Güç Dengeleme Tutkusu

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Abstract

There are various power-balancing strategies have been examined in the field of International Relations and Political Science scholarship. While Western powers generally tend to use hard power or hard balancing strategies, China distinguishes itself from them by often seeking power balancing through soft and normative power. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country has pursued a peaceful policy in its international affairs. Although China has recently adopted a more proactive foreign policy in parallel with its increasing political and economic influence in global politics and its tense relations with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and neighbouring countries, it has not moved away from its traditional peaceful foreign policy. Accordingly, China has focused on goals such as maintaining its Non-interference policies, realizing the Chinese Dream through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and establishing Confucius Institutes to increase its normative and soft power influence in the international arena. This study aims to analyse China's power balancing strategies through soft and normative power strategies, in the context of China's current rising power position in the international arena.

Keywords: Power Balancing, Soft Power, Normative Power, Theories of International Relation, China.

Öz

Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Siyaset Bilimi alanlarında araştırma konusu olmuş farklı güç dengeleme stratejileri mevcuttur. Batılı güçler genellikle sert güç veya sert dengeleme stratejilerini kullanma eğilimi gösterme gayretindeyken, Çin genellikle yumuşak ve normatif güç kullanma yoluyla, kendisini güç dengeleme stratejisi bağlamında farklılaştırmaya çalışmaktadır. Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti, kuruluşundan bu yana, dış ilişkilerinde barışçıl bir dış politika izlemeye çalışmıştır. Çin, küresel politikada artan siyasi ve ekonomik nüfuzuna ve Tayvan, Hong Kong ve diğer komşu ülkelerle olan gergin ilişkilerine paralel olarak, son zamanlarda daha proaktif bir dış politika benimseme gayreti içerisinde olsa da geleneksel ve barışçıl dış politikasından uzaklaşmamıştır. Buna göre Çin, başka ülkelerin iç işlerine karışmamak anlamına gelen müdahale etmeme politikasını sürdürmek, Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi aracılığıyla Çin Rüyasını gerçekleştirmek, uluslararası alanda normatif ve yumuşak güç etkisini artırmak için Konfüçyüs Enstitüleri kurmak gibi farklı hedefler üzerinde yoğunlaşmış durumdadır. Bu çalışma, Çin'in uluslararası alandaki mevcut yükselen güç konumu çerçevesinde, Çin'in güç dengeleme stratejisini yine Çin'in yumuşak ve normatif güç stratejileri bağlamında analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güç Dengeleme, Yumuşak Güç, Normatif Güç, Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri, Çin.

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A comprehensive examination of Chinese foreign policy through the framework of power balancing reveals a profound integration of soft power in both theoretical foundations and practical applications. This integration can be attributed, in part, to the influence of prominent Chinese strategists, including adherents of Taoism, Confucius, and Mencius. These thinkers recognized that power could be cultivated through benevolence, morality, and effective governance. In contemporary China, the role of political, economic, national, and regional interests is evident in the diffusion of Chinese norms. In this context, China's normative power policies have a significant impact in shaping its foreign policy landscape (Nye, 2004).

As an emerging power, China undertakes a pivotal role in discussions about power-balancing within the fields of International Relations and Political Science. Realist scholars characterize rising powers as potential revisionist forces that may pose a threat to established powers or introduce risks to the international system (Ding, 2010). While some scholars assert that China qualifies as a revisionist state, citing its expanding economic and military capabilities, others argue that there is no inherent motivation for China to adopt a revisionist stance. The argument posits that China stands to benefit most from the current liberal international order (Ikenberry, 2008; Feng & He, 2020). Regardless of whether China is deemed a revisionist power, it is evident that China is increasing its political, military, and economic influence. Simultaneously, China is engaging in power-balancing manoeuvres by avoiding more assertive strategies.

The main question of this study is what factors motivate China to focus on soft balancing strategies rather than pursuing hard balancing instruments in its foreign relations.? We think that China is actively employing a power-balancing strategy, particularly directed towards Western powers, with a primary focus on the United States. Notably, China's approach to power balancing diverges from traditional methods, which predominantly rely on hard balancing strategies. China deliberately avoids the pursuit of hard balancing, a departure influenced by its historical legacy. Instead, China's power balancing is rooted in a soft balancing strategy within the broader framework of soft and normative power. The nation strategically employs soft and normative power to balance against the influence of the United States. We also try to demonstrate the influence of China's historical philosophical traditions on its foreign policy by highlighting China's commitment to peaceful rise, soft and normative power, and a possible shift towards hard balancing strategies in the future.

This study aims to examine China's expanding influence, specifically examining its power-seeking strategies, such as soft and normative power. The initial section of the article provides an extensive literature review, contextualizing the analysis within the broader discourse on power and power balancing. Subsequently, the study proceeds with an examination of China's strategies within the BRI, Non-Intervention policies, and the establishment of Confucius Institutes, with a particular emphasis on soft and normative power perspectives.

Methodology

Qualitative research is one of the significant methods in social sciences studies which is thought to play a leading role in the continuation and development of International Relations and Political Science in the foreseeable future (Mahoney, 2007; Bennett & Elman, 2007). This study attempts to use social sciences research methods to reach an academic analysis of power balancing theories and studies have been done on soft and normative power balancing conception.

With the help of qualitative research, we can conclude our research by finding answers to the questions asked and comprehending the theories used in the study. In this research, the primary resources will be based on the historical and present evidence of scholarly published books, journal articles, book chapters in edited books, and official documents, including official reports, newspapers, government publications, and the websites of Ministries and Embassies.

The Evolution of Soft and Normative Powers

Soft and normative power constitute integral elements of long-term political strategies within the field of international relations scholarship. These forms of power exhibit a comparatively gradual pace in achieving their objectives when contrasted with hard power. Conversely, the concept of soft balancing driven by normative and soft power has received relatively limited attention within the realm of political science and international relations.

Within the international arena, a state possesses certain characteristics that are pivotal for predicting its behaviour and the repercussions of its decisions. These include the ability to transform power, the capacity to transform potential power, and the possession of critical power resources (Nye, 1990). In such an anarchic system of international relations, a state may sense threats from other states. In this case, the threatened state may need to pursue balancing or bandwagon strategies (Elman, 2003; Papageorgiou et al., 2024).

A considerable number of realist scholars argue that a state's power in the international system is determined by factors such as its population, GDPⁱ, technology, geography, power status, the size of its military personnel and equipment, education level, and CINC scoreⁱⁱ (Nye, 1990; Lake, 2007). These factors significantly influence a state's power-balancing strategies. If a country is relatively strong or has the potential to emerge as a major regional or international power, it will actively pursue power-balancing strategies and the above-mentioned factors will act as facilitators in the power-balancing process.

It is asserted that weaker states typically seek to balance against more powerful states, driven by shared interests in countering the influence of more powerful states. When the concept of balancing enters the discourse, and parties mutually agree to collaborate to counterbalance a dominant state, the dominant state is left with few options to prevent this development (Waltz, 1997; Waltz, 2000). Owing to the inherent imbalances in the global system, the power of a dominant state induces feelings of insecurity and unease among other states, compelling them to explore alternative strategies over an extended period. Consequently, states may opt for "internal balancing," focusing on enhancing their self-sufficiency or pursue "external balancing," which involves forming comprehensive alliances with other states against the established power to strengthen their sense of security. This endeavour continues until the dominant state, or states assume control or devise alternative strategies to reduce coerciveness. Balancing against a dominant state in isolation is perceived as challenging in the contemporary, high-stakes nuclear age. Thus, states may achieve a semblance of balance through the concept of soft balancing by building coalitions or alliances (Paul, 2005). In conclusion, this inclination facilitates a state's efforts to refine its power-balancing strategies to attain desired outcomes. Nevertheless, the state retains the flexibility to alter its balancing strategy at any time by making this policy highly adaptable.

The development of soft balancing depends primarily on political alignments and diplomatic initiatives. Simultaneously, aligning with the ascending power can lead to bandwagoning as a response to its ascent (McDougall, 2012). Conversely, Waltz contends that the actions of other states play pivotal roles in shaping the destiny of a state seeking power balancing (Waltz, 1979). When a state enhances its military capacity, other states may feel left behind, insecure, and relatively weak as explained in the security dilemma theory (Jervis, 1978). This trend, however, is not limited to hard power balancing; it is likely to appear in soft balancing, soft power, and smart power as well.

According to classical international relations theories, the power of states is predominantly determined by their military power, political influence, and material resources (Schweller, 1994). Hans Morgenthau argues that if a state seeks to augment its power and alter the balance of power in its favour, it will inevitably adopt a policy rooted in imperialism (Morgenthau, 1985). However, if a rising state is relatively weak, indicating a power vacuum around it, the rising state is likely compelled to fill that void (Schweller, 1994). The expansion of power and territory stands as the ultimate goal for states, aiming to extend their political, economic, and cultural influence on other countries (Wight, 1978). Generally, countries with closely matched power ratios tend to pursue a power-balancing strategy against the rival or more powerful state to limit potential threats.

Morgenthau claims that regardless of the type and level of balancing, the balancing process will ultimately culminate in hard balancing. Thus, soft balancing can be seen as a precursor to hard balancing. Therefore, a state may initially adopt a soft balancing strategy, but it retains the flexibility to transition to a more conventional approach at any stage of its soft balancing strategy (Morgenthau, 1967; Waltz, 1979; Claude, 1962). The satisfaction of balancing states is achieved when the limits of soft balancing are reached, which promotes a transition toward hard balancing. However, determining when a balancing state reaches this level of satisfaction is not easily predictable. Walt emphasizes: *“Balancing is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat.”* (Walt, 1987).

The perceptions of threat or the proximity of two rivals to each other can exert a crucial influence on the pursuit of a soft balancing strategy (Walt, 1985; Walt, 1987). Power balancing is indicative of a state's behaviour, as states often align to counteract a state seeking supremacy in power. In the modern era, a powerful state cannot maintain its pre-eminence indefinitely. When one state becomes more powerful, other states typically seek to form alliances against it to mitigate potential threats. Additionally, states may pursue policies aimed at increasing power by establishing external alliances, thereby fortifying their internal growth against future threats (Nye, 1990). In this context, the significant increase in power or the establishment of strategic alliances carries potential risks for the future of the superpower. Moreover, such actions may prompt the rival state to seek reasonable means to implement power-balancing policies.

As a balancing strategy, soft power is defined by its capacity to enable a state to achieve satisfactory balancing without resorting to coercive measures that influence other states' decisions; rather, it is based on the attraction and harmonization of common interests. Soft power is the ability to attain desired goals or outcomes by influencing the behaviours of others and persuading them to accept one's preferences (Nye, 2008). Robert Cox argues that as a balancing alternative, soft power is not any less significant than hard command power; if recognized as legitimate by others, it encounters less resistance when aiming to achieve a result. States with attractive ideologies and cultures are more likely to be followed willingly by others (Cox, 1987; Nye, 1990). Therefore, the more attractive and legitimate policies a state adopts in establishing alliances, the easier it is to achieve balancing goals.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that any attempt to influence and balance against rivals may lead dominant states to transform into hegemonic powers by enabling them to push their limits and potentially result in the emergence of a status quo power. However, such a state would not be considered a hegemon, as a hegemon is an authoritative state capable of ruling over many others in the political system of its time (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Normative power represents a significant source of influence, and various early definitions were provided by Carr, Galtung, and Duchêne. Carr's attempt to define normative power included economic, military, and ideational dimensions (Carr, 1962). Galtung highlighted 'ideological power,' by emphasizing the influence of ideas while also acknowledging other forces such as punitive, rewarding, resource, and structural power (Galtung, 1973). Duchêne, on the other hand, sought to characterize

normative power within the framework of *idée force*, beginning with the perspectives of the 'founding fathers' and influencing political characters (Manners, 2002; Duchêne, 1973).

In the context of global governance, normative power is defined as the ability to systematize norms among actors and ensure their dissemination in global governance. Consequently, actors aiming to exercise normative power are likely to seek changes in the existing normative order in line with the norms they intend to implement (Peng, 2020; Wunderlich, 2013). Manners conceptualizes normative power as the capacity to shape conceptions of norms in international relations or the global arena (Manners, 2002). In this context, China is an example that appears inclined towards this strategy, notably reflected in its non-intervention policies since the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

Some scholars researching normative power contend that its influence on the perceptions of other international actors is relatively limited and not necessarily direct. Instead, they argue that normative power influences other actors primarily by shaping the framework of their responses (Kavalski, 2013). Similarly, Womack defines normative power as the ability of an actor to significantly influence the actions of others (Womack, 2008).

Ian Manners asserts that normative power and normative justification carry more weight than physical force and material incentives. Thus, to comprehend the normative impressively, it is crucial to understand its impact, actions, and underlying principles (Manners, 2009; Kavalski, 2013). The effective exercise of normative power is essential for states to disseminate their norms successfully. Consequently, normative diffusion strategies must be attractive and practical, ensuring that the normative values communicated do not carry a hostile meaning globally or towards targeted regions and states.

Normative power, according to Manners (2002), is the ability to shape the behaviours of others concerning what is deemed tolerable, intolerable, or considered normal. Similarly, Diez argues that normative powers must have the consent of others, while Jackson emphasizes the importance of earning legitimacy and posits that tolerance is a fundamental component of normative power (Jackson, 1975; Kavalski, 2013; Manners, 2002; Diez, 2013; Diez, 2005). Thus, the normative values a state seeks to disseminate should be aligned with the specific norms and values of the targeted areas. In fact, for real success in the normative power process, it is an indisputable fact that a state must have qualities such as attractiveness, tolerance, normality, consent, and feasibility that are compatible with the above-mentioned factors.

China's Power Balancing Strategy

China's foreign policy has been deeply influenced by the historical and philosophical thoughts of Chinese thinkers. The Chinese government aims to chart a course that aligns with its political achievements throughout history. As Amitav Acharya rightly stated, current Chinese foreign policy cannot be separated from Chinese traditions and cultural values. It finds its roots in the Chinese concept of Tianxia ideology and the philosophies of Confucius, Mo-tzu, Lao-tzu, Han Feizi and Xunzi. China has achieved significant great power status on both the national and international fronts. The recent actions by China demonstrate an effort to showcase both soft and hard power, particularly in regions such as Africa, where it seeks to outshine the West or leverage its influence over Western powers (Acharya, 2019). However, like other rising and established powers in political history, China needs to prepare itself against potential political threats or take responsibility for its hierarchical position in the international arena.

Some Chinese scholars argue that when China faces a moderate threat, it tends to act in accordance with the principles of both Confucianism and *realpolitik*. Confucianism influences Chinese leaders to adopt

a non-aggressive stance when in an advantageous position, while *realpolitik* prompts more assertive actions when facing disadvantages in relations with rivals. The current shift towards a negative or competitive policy is attributed to the escalating tensions in South Asia (Feng & He, 2019). The structural power transition within the global system is widely believed to increase the likelihood of conflicts between rising powers like China and established powers such as the United States (Organski, 1968; Feng & He, 2019). Among the potential adversaries, the United States stands out as a significant contender for triggering a major conflict with China. This is not only due to the perception of China as a formidable military rival but also because the United States recognizes China as a critical economic and soft power, which can significantly impact United States interests globally. Consequently, China's evolving political stance and its emphasis on increasing military expenditures to pursue a proactive and assertive foreign policy can be traced back to its dissatisfaction with the foreign policies of the United States and other Western powers. China has become the second country to spend more on military expenditures and increase its militaristic capabilities.

Some scholars argue that despite the numerous United States air bases in the Pacific Ocean, there are only two of them near the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, they argue that the likelihood of a conflict between China and the United States is relatively low. It is unlikely that one of these countries would willingly escalate tensions, as this would expose them to the risk of a violent and unstable war accompanied by economic and welfare losses (Shlapak et al., 2009; Montgomery, 2014). In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the reliance on hard power to resolve political issues among major powers is not the favoured approach. In the 21st century, nuclear escalation and militaristic operations are not only riskier but also increasingly costly. A decade ago, U.S. officials acknowledged their support for East Asian treaty allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines by deploying 60 percent of its naval forces in the Pacific. Additionally, there has been a deepening of cooperation with emerging regional powers like India, Indonesia, and Vietnam (The White House Press Office, 2013; Clarke, 2018). In this sense, China may not have seen this as just a simple collaboration of alliances, but probably as an attack on its security in the future. These factors have certainly contributed significantly to the rising tensions between China and the United States.

John Mearsheimer argues that great powers consistently strive to leverage allies and rivals to uphold the balance of power. Additionally, they often seek to utilize conflicts between rival states to maintain their dominance in the prevailing global political order. Accordingly, Mearsheimer claims that as China strengthens, it is likely to adopt a more assertive stance in its foreign relations (Mearsheimer, 2001). In contrast, Joseph Nye diverts our attention by asserting that an equal distribution of power in world history has been a rare occurrence. Attempts by states to balance power have typically resulted in wars (Nye, 2004). Similarly, Ding argues that, from a realistic perspective, the ascent of a new great power is often perceived as a threat to global security as well as may lead to conflict (Ding, 2010).

During the visit of the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China to Myanmar in 2005, a statement was made emphasizing China's non-interference in Myanmar's domestic affairs. This statement served a dual purpose: first, as a demonstration of a behavioral pattern that China sought to establish, and second, as a message from China to the Western world, Middle Eastern states, Africa, and Central Asia (Chen, 2007). Essentially, for China to refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of other nations is both an indication of its preferred behaviour and a strategic measure to protect itself from external interference in its sensitive internal issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

According to Waltz, in bipolar world politics, power has assumed a broader scope as a tool of competition. Military preparedness, economic growth, and technological advancements have become constant sources of concern and intensity in the international arena. On the other hand, Gilpin argues that beyond economic, militaristic, and technological factors, factors such as the quality of political

leadership and public morale can have much more significant effects on political events (Waltz, 1979). In this context, China's recent political activeness, its leadership for economic cooperation, its increasing investment in other regions and countries, and its cultural activities are critical factors that increase the Chinese power-balancing bargain.

Given China's economic and technological position, its role in the context of balancing power on the global stage is becoming increasingly evident. Waltz also suggests that as a superpower, the United States will face balancing efforts. This may occur through one or more states aligning their capabilities to counterbalance the United States, potentially leading to the reconstruction of a multipolar international system (Waltz, 2000). However, the nature of this balancing remains unclear, whether it is hard balancing or soft balancing.

Chinese President Hu Jintao declared that China follows the path of peaceful development due to its history and traditional culture (Ai, 2011). Accordingly, peaceful development, win-win strategies, and peaceful coexistence principles underscore China's effort to align its international standing with its commitment to historical and cultural values. In this context, some Chinese scholars argue that recognition of a responsible major or rising power should not be unilateral; rather, it should be determined by the acceptance and judgment of other states or powers (Feng & He, 2020). When other states and powers perceive China as a rising power, they are also likely to recognize its power-balancing potential. Hence power competition will inevitably arise.

China's global position has allowed it to present itself as a responsible and reliable international actor that offers alternatives such as the BRI, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, BRICS, and the New Development Bank to Western actors and institutions. In particular, China has generally avoided interfering in the internal affairs of other nations and has taken a cautious approach to establishing full relations with numerous international institutions and regimes (Lanteigne, 2005). China deliberately avoids excessive dependence on international institutions, aiming to distinguish itself from Western states in the formulation of its international policies, with the goal of attracting more countries to collaborate with China.

In recent years, China has been expressing soft power discourse more and more frequently. This shows that China will struggle to increase its soft power more actively in the future. Since Chinese policymakers emphasize that the cultivation of soft power is as crucial as the economic advancements that have elevated China to great power status. Consequently, China actively pursues soft power policies to achieve its long-term political and economic objectives (Xinhua News Agency, 2007). Consequently, China is likely to strengthen its international position to emerge as an important player in power dynamics and balancing concepts in the international arena.

It is argued that China's policy of peaceful rise and non-interference in international affairs has led many countries to perceive themselves as contributors to the preservation of China's national and international values. However, the Chinese government views these policies as specific and concrete approaches to international relations with various actors (Womack, 2008; Kavalski, 2013). While some may interpret China's non-intervention policy as a manifestation of strategic sovereignty. However, China does not appear to be seeking to establish sovereignty and does not see the need to do so. China actively promotes the policy of non-intervention as a norm in Chinese foreign policy on a global scale.

Balancing an established power, particularly the United States, through hard power strategies is currently seen as extremely challenging; leading countries are unlikely to attempt to balance military or hard power against a superpower (Wohlforth, 1999). Instead, the strategy for balancing a superpower, such as the United States, is perceived to be more effective when grounded in non-militaristic goals and soft balancing components, including economic, diplomatic, and institutional strategies (Layne, 2014;

Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005). Scholars analyzing China's approach to balancing the United States argue that, due to limitations in resources, technology, and recent military experience, China needs to explore asymmetric approaches to create deterrence and avoid potential confrontations (Montgomery, 2014). In parallel with these arguments, China is likely trying to demonstrate its peaceful approach to international relations and gain more supporters in the world by strengthening its soft power discourse while avoiding militarist and hard-balancing strategies. As a result, China aims to balance the United States by reaching the level of deterrence in power balancing.

On the other hand, the shift in Chinese foreign policy, notably with the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CCP), marked the transition from an old approach to a new one shaped by the Xi Jinping administration, known as the "great revival of the Chinese nation-the Chinese Dream." Departing from a low-profile foreign policy, China under the Xi administration established initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Belt and Road, fostering a more self-confident and assertive stance in international relations. The Chinese Government emphasizes that any country seeking cooperation with China must respect China's core interests (Zhou, 2019). In this context, empirical evidence of China's more assertive foreign policy can confirm the claim of a shift from a traditionally peaceful stance to a more proactive stance. China's foreign policy decisions over time, statements, and analysis of their actions can be examined to detect shifts towards a more proactive stance, especially in the context of tense relations with Taiwan, Hong Kong, neighboring states in South Asia, and internal issues such as Xinjiang and Tibet, where China has always claimed that Western states are intervening.

Under the Xi administration, China's proactive stance in norm transmission has increased significantly, especially in environmental diplomacy. China employs the norm diffusion approach not only to signify the rise of a new great power but also to safeguard its political and economic interests (Peng, 2020). Consequently, China adopts a distinctive normative power strategy, guided by principles of non-interference, mutual respect, and win-win policies (Womack, 2008; Kavalski, 2013; Peng, 2020). This strategy is not only based on China's national and international interests but also aims to position China as a reliable global power and invite international partners to reasonably share global opportunities.

China's increasing political and economic influence has led the country to aspire to play a more significant role in global governance, emphasizing its status, values, and interests. China's BRI is strengthened by a multilateral grand strategy focusing on security, influence, and status. This kind of multilateral cooperation has the potential to facilitate a peaceful transformation of the existing international system and help China avoid the 'Thucydides Trap' (Zhou & Estaban, 2018). In addition to seeking a critical role in the international system through initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China also aims to reshape the global financial system. China is increasingly encouraging countries cooperating with China to use local currencies in their bilateral trade to internationalize the Chinese Yuan. As part of its strategy to enhance soft power influence, Chinese leaders have implemented a form of "smile diplomacy," organizing a series of visits to other countries (Blanchard & Lu, 2012). On the other hand, it should be underlined that the military and economic ascent of China bears a risk of conflicts with the United States, as the United States military posture has not been balanced since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In recent years, China has focused its efforts on increasing its influence in the Asia-Pacific region; This indicates a significant increase in its political, economic, and military presence. As a result, the United States perceives China as a threat to its political and strategic interests and encourages the announcement of a strategy to minimize China's growing influence in Asia (Montgomery, 2014). The possibility of China and the United States falling into the Thucydides Trap, which Allison (2017) defines as the "Destined War", remains to be a critical issue discussed in the international arena. Despite

these uncertainties, the United States continues to seek deep engagement in response to the rise of China and aims to strengthen its defence capabilities in the Asia-Pacific (Montgomery, 2014). Just as China is dissatisfied with the United States presence in South Asia, the United States is also dissatisfied with China's increasing international influence.

As it is widely known, China is dissatisfied with the current international governance order, as China perceives it as shaped by Western and colonial powers (Zhou, 2019). Intending to reshape the international governance system, China seeks to implement its governance norms and policies. Leveraging its historical advantage of lacking a colonial record, China aims to promote a peaceful coexistence model through win-win cooperation strategies. As highlighted by Acharya, China supports both a universal, egalitarian, and inclusive world order and a realpolitik hierarchy in the region to safeguard regional sovereignty and national interests. This dual approach represents a characteristic of Chinese foreign policy that China desires to implement in the current international system (Acharya, 2019).

An important point to note is that China's power-balancing strategies differ from those of Western countries. Like socialism with Chinese characteristics, power balancing in China also exhibits China's unique characteristics. Timo also emphasizes that China's soft power standards should not be compared with Western standards accepted by scholars such as Nye, Schambaugh, Ikenberry, and the Pew Research Center (Timo, 2014). However, it is acknowledged that China faces some challenges, such as the less developed appeal of Chinese education and the lack of Chinese cultural influence, leaving China behind developed countries (Zhou, 2019). To address this, China has established Confucius Institutes around the world by teaching Chinese and spreading Chinese culture to increase its soft power. These institutes operate in almost every country and region, and their numbers are increasing day by day (Dig Mandarin, 2024). With the establishment of Confucius Institutes, China aims to ensure that the world and China mutually better understand each other. (Han, 2011). Another component of China's soft power deployment is the China Global Television Network (CGTN) and its official websites established globally to strengthen Chinese normative and soft power in various languages such as English, Arabic, Arabic (e.g., CGTN EUROPE, CGTN AFRICA, CGTN AMERICA). Russian, Spanish, and French.

China asserts that the principles of "core interests" are non-negotiable. President Xi aims to maintain a diplomacy based on great power diplomacy and establish China as a dominant power in certain regions to counter the United States military presence. Employing Chinese nationalism, history, and national identity, the CCP seeks to balance international pressures and address domestic issues (Peng, 2020; Wunderlich, 2013). This political inclination has raised concerns in the United States, with the deputy director of the CIA stating that Beijing is waging a "cold war" against the United States (Tarabay, 2018). While many states maintain economic and diplomatic ties with China, they also have the capacity to limit China's political and economic development. These states can challenge Chinese interests with support from the United States. In this respect, China's soft balancing strategy is seen as a necessary policy.

Consequently, China's foreign policy is observed to align with principles of a peaceful rise, non-intervention policies, and emphases of win-win cooperation and harmony. This is supported by the actual implementation of initiatives such as the BRI and the establishment of Confucius Institutes. China has actively pursued soft and normative power strategies to enhance its influence on the global stage. China's soft balancing strategy aligns with its historical values and traditions. By examining China's historical context, we may need to discover examples where China's foreign policy decisions and actions reflect a commitment to soft balancing, such as prioritizing diplomacy and economic cooperation over military aggression.

Non-Intervention Policies as a Normative Strategy

The roots of modern Chinese normative power can be traced back to the Mao Zedong era, particularly to the "Ten Principles" articulated in 1955 during the Bandung Conference. During this period, China's then Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, proposed the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" in 1953 between the Chinese and Indian governments. These political principles are based on mutual respect for sovereignty, peaceful coexistence, territorial integrity, equality, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual benefit in political and economic cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020). Since then, China has endeavoured to adhere to its principles and values in international relations.

In this vein, Chinese President Xi Jinping has emphasized China's commitment to these principles by expressing readiness to establish political relations with states willing to accept the principles of the new China. Under President Xi's administration, China not only upholds its principles and values but also aspires to see other states adopt these principles. President Xi's statement reflects China's desire to foster a global environment where these principles guide international relations:

For 60 years, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have struck deep roots and flourished in China, India and Myanmar. Meanwhile, thanks to the important contribution made by the three countries, these principles are accepted in other parts of Asia and the world. China believes that the successful application of the Five Principles in international relations fully testifies to their strong vitality. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2014)

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence strategy was established among China, India, and Myanmar in the early 1950s. This political initiative should not only be seen as a framework that guides China's foreign policy on the international stage; Rather, it represents an important step in the expansion of China's normative power (Zhou & Estaban, 2018). China has further sought to enhance its soft power by putting forward concepts such as Peaceful Development, Peaceful Coexistence, Peaceful Rise, a Harmonious World, and a Community of Common Destiny (Zheng, 2005, Zhou & Estaban, 2018). These articulated principles signify China's commitment to fostering peaceful international relations and a shared global destiny. As President Xi stated: *The Chinese nation has always held such beliefs as "peace is most precious", "harmony without uniformity", "peace among all nations" and "universal love and non-aggression"*. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2014).

The Chinese Government aimed to establish the concept of building a harmonious world, contributing to the strengthening of China's narrative of peaceful power amidst the nation's increasing normative influence. In line to play a more substantial role as a responsible rising global power and enhance China's soft power and normative power, President Xi introduced the concept of common destiny and shared interests within the global community (Xinhua News Agency, 2007; Zhou & Estaban, 2018). China strives to promote not only the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence but also other components of Chinese norms and values; It strives to not only elevate China's role as a normative power but also to spread these norms and ideas across the continent to promote a positive future for the BRI in the context of regional cooperation. However, there are also opposing voices among Chinese scientists who are dissatisfied with China's non-intervention policy and advocate the establishment of military bases and alliance policies (Shen, 2010; Wang, 2017; Feng & He, 2020). The main motivation behind such perspectives is the increasing scale of Chinese investments around the world, which necessitates China's capacity to protect its overseas interests. As a result, the argument is made that China may need to use force to resolve certain overseas issues. Accordingly, historical data and diplomatic records can be examined to verify China's commitment to a peaceful foreign policy since the founding of the People's Republic of China. On the other hand, recent diplomatic tensions or military conflicts indicate that the risk of conflict between China and established superpowers persists.

BRI as a Component of Power Balancing Strategy

The Chinese government has established the BRI as an important economic and political tool shaping a new global geopolitical landscape. Beyond its role in setting ambitious economic agendas and fostering regional economic collaboration with numerous countries along its path, the BRI is strategically employed by China as a tool to advance its geopolitical and geostrategic interests in Eurasia, the Middle East, and other regions (Zhou & Estaban, 2018). The importance of the BRI is further emphasized by the cooperation willingness of countries along the route to cooperate in line with President Xi's win-win economic concept. China is keen to reap the benefits from this collaborative process. In parallel, President Xi confirmed:

China will enhance friendship and cooperation with all countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. We are ready to share practices of development with other countries, but we have no intention to interfere in other countries' internal affairs, export our own social system and model of development, or impose our own will on others. In pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative, we will not resort to outdated geopolitical maneuvering. What we hope to achieve is a new model of win-win cooperation. We have no intention to form a small group detrimental to stability, what we hope to create is a big family of harmonious co-existence. (Xinhua News Agency, 2017)

China constantly emphasizes the importance of cooperation and harmony in its foreign relations. In this context, Keohane argues that cooperation results from the alignment of actual and expected preferences between actors. Simply put, cooperation occurs when a government's policies are accepted by its partners, facilitating the achievement of common goals. On the other hand, harmony is achieved through the independent policies of the state, without depending on the opinions of others. Policy coordination is ongoing to encourage states to adjust their policies according to the guidance of other states. Although alignment has close ties to cooperation, it does not involve complex bargaining or negotiations. Cohesion is apolitical and communication is relatively minimal. In contrast, collaboration is political and requires changing behaviour through positive and negative incentives (Keohane, 1984).

The BRI stands as a crucial strategic tool for China, serving the purpose of establishing strong trade links between China and European markets, which are among the most dynamic markets in the world today. China envisions creating a sea express route that will connect China's Xinjiang region with the port of Piraeus, an important European port and trade centre bridging the Balkans and the Middle East. This initiative is designed to bolster China's economic strength, internationalize the Renminbiⁱⁱⁱ and diversify energy routes and suppliers (Casarini, 2016; Zhou & Estaban, 2018). The BRI should therefore be viewed not only as an economic cooperation between Asian countries but also as a strategic move that positions itself as China's 'Pivot to Europe' strategy in response to the United State's 'Pivot to Asia' strategy (Fallon, 2014).

China's BRI strategy is strategically aligned with a multilateral soft balancing approach, aiming to weaken U.S. dominance and influence while simultaneously advancing China's normative power by projecting its values and interests to reshape global governance (Zhou & Estaban, 2018). BRI offers a development paradigm of cooperation to participating parties in the context of investment, trade facilitation, and financial integration in many areas (Yildirimcakar & Han, 2022). The BRI has undeniably enhanced China's standing in the international arena; however, it also brings political risks such as geopolitical competition, territorial disputes, and security threats.

Prominent Chinese scholar Wang Jisi argues that through the BRI, China is not only implementing the 'March to the West' (西进) strategy but also using it as a power balancing tool against United States policy (Sun, 2013). The United States has pursued strategies to contain China and limit its growing

influence in South Asia, particularly in regions such as the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, Indian Sea, and Malacca Strait. This containment effort by the United States was aimed at curbing China's expanding economic influence, exemplified by the establishment of significant economic cooperation under the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Devadason, 2014; Zhou & Estaban, 2018). In response, China aspires to have a profound influence in shaping a new world order characterized by harmonious and peaceful coexistence (Zhou & Estaban, 2018). As a result, China's increasing global influence is intensifying the strategic competition between China and the United States. This concentration is making progress within the framework of win-win opportunities and investment promises to the countries that China has partnered with through the BRI.

Alignment with China is becoming increasingly important, especially for many countries that are close to China or do not have advanced relations with the United States and other Western powers. These nations think they will achieve greater political and economic gains by aligning with rising powers. On the contrary, for China to rise significantly, cooperation with these countries based on mutual trust and respect is essential (Zhao & Qi, 2016). This type of cooperation not only provides a sense of security but also facilitates win-win cooperation, both politically and economically by fostering China's soft power. At the 17th CPC Congress, then-Chinese President Hu Jintao emphasized the importance of the soft power of Chinese culture with the following words

Culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength... We must enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests. (Xinhua, 2007)

Zhou Enlai, the First Premier of the People's Republic of China, summarized this importance with the phrase "外事无小事", meaning "there are no small things in foreign affairs" (Feng & He, 2020). Consequently, cooperation with any country has deep significance in Chinese Foreign Policy, as China seeks partnerships to sustain its economic growth and increase its influence in the international arena, soft power is a critical tool for Chinese academics and political elites to achieve great power status (综国力- *zonghe guoli*) which means increasing China's comprehensive national power.

In pursuit of tremendous achievements, China has adopted the identity of a great nation by taking advantage of its large population, vast territory, and rapidly growing economy. Widely considered a potential revisionist power, China is seen as a rival that could challenge United States interests in East Asia. Moreover, there is a widespread belief that China has significant soft power potential and can attract global attention with its unique ideas, values, and initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (Ding, 2010; Waltz, 2000). Examining official documents, speeches, and policy implementations can provide evidence of China's goals, including the continuation of non-interference policies and the realization of the Chinese Dream through the Belt and Road Initiatives and win-win strategies. However, the prospect of protecting expanding overseas interests may lead to the adoption of strict balancing strategies in the future. Future empirical research could therefore focus on monitoring China's foreign policy decisions and actions to identify situations where a shift towards strict balancing strategies is evident. This may include examining military formations, alliances, or confrontational postures in response to perceived threats.

Confucius Institutes

Confucianism stands out as one of the most influential movements that has significantly shaped the behavior of the Chinese people. Confucius constantly emphasized the importance of morality not only for Chinese people but also for individuals from other cultures. In this respect, Confucian thought is closely aligned with soft power principles, emphasizing attraction over coercion. In this context, one of the fundamental tenets of Confucianism is summarized in the phrase '*lai er bu ju, bu wang jiao zhi*' (来而不拒, 不往教之) (Nye, 2004 ; Feng & He, 2019), “advocating an open approach to those seeking knowledge and refraining from imposing teachings without solicitation”. As Shambaugh observes, China differentiates itself by pursuing a broader agenda, holding summits, media initiatives, conferences, sporting events, and educational exchanges (Shambaugh, 2015). As a result, Confucius Institutes have a global structure, and their large-scale activities indicate China's effort to increase its normative and soft power influence. Therefore, the existence and influence of Confucius Institutes observed in different regions will provide empirical support for China's strategy to increase soft power.

Confucius Institutes, which are present globally, operate primarily in university environments, playing important roles in connecting Chinese and foreign stakeholders, facilitating business activities, and disseminating Chinese culture and language (Yellinek et al., 2020). Consequently, those intrigued by China, including its culture, history, philosophy, and language, will easily become accustomed to what the Confucius Institute has to offer. Therefore, China aims to promote recognition of and a positive attitude towards its traditional and political norms and values.

Abundant evidence underscores China's determination to develop soft power strategies. This evidence includes diplomatic visits, educational exchange programs, participation in multilateral forums, the establishment of Confucius Institutes around the world, the BRI, and the influence of China's state-owned media outlet (CGTN). As China establishes increasingly interactive and bilateral relations with various countries, it aims to ensure acceptance of China's future political and economic strategies.

Conclusion

Modern China's foreign policy is deeply shaped by its historical philosophical traditions. Discussions about China's peaceful policies are also echoed in China's domestic discourse. However, as it has been the case throughout Chinese history, China's foreign policy has consistently embraced the struggle within the framework of the principles of peaceful rise. It has shaped its soft power strategy in its foreign relations with the logic of win-win cooperation. In this context, China has seized important opportunities to increase its soft and normative power by pursuing non-interference policies, the BRI, and the establishment of Confucius Institutes. However, the prospect of protecting its expanding overseas interests may force China to pursue strict balancing strategies in the future.

Positioning itself as a rising great power, China strategically implements power-balancing tactics in the field of soft and normative power. Moving away from Western powers, China follows a soft balancing strategy in line with its historical values and traditions. Considering China's political history, it seems that China does not implement a strict balancing strategy unless forced by external powers. China's lack of a colonial past and its commitment to a peaceful foreign policy make it easier to establish multifaceted relations with other countries. In this context, China has the opportunity to present itself as an alternative to the dominance of established superpowers, especially the United States. However, the rise of China and balancing strategies in the context of normative and soft power brings with it the risk of conflict with existing global powers. As China's strategic and cooperative behaviour on the global stage improves, China will make progress toward becoming a superpower. However, it is not yet clear whether China will be able to maintain its current peaceful foreign policy in parallel with its increasing power.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study is not applicable.

Author Contributions

The author confirms the sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis, writing, and revision of this article.

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Notes

ⁱ GDP is the abbreviation of Gross Domestic Product

ⁱⁱ Cinc score is the abbreviation of the Composite Index of National Capabilities score.

ⁱⁱⁱ Renminbi is usually used for Chinese Currency in China instead of Yuan.